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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor’s Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
  """""""""""""""""""""""""""""

Another long and hectic week on the home front. I wonder if things will ever get back to a "normal insanity"! Not anytime soon, I’d say.

I went down to Maine last weekend (yes, "down" to Maine - this is how we New Englanders refer to it!) to visit my folks. The fall foliage was almost at peak; and it really was a nice sight along the way. I couldn’t believe how much my old neighborhood has changed, at least with regard to the outward appearance. It’s basically the same houses and things, but just looks different. It’s just weird seeing the area where you grew up not being exactly the way you left it. Then again, it’s been over 25 years since I lived there!

Well, we have a jam-packed issue for you this week. And, yes Joe, I do have an advantage over you each week! Remember that lottery ticket you asked me about? Well, I have the winning ticket right here. And your inference that the winnings from said ticket could be used to buy up Atari patents and such? Well, ironically, Hasbro is going through some tough times at the moment, according to an article I read this week. Word has it that perhaps Hasbro might sell its Hasbro Interactive division to get back on a positive track. If this should occur, everything Atari would be a part of that sale. I wonder what might happen as a result!

Until next time...

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Tetrax MOD Player Released

Tetrax, a new MOD player, has been released. It does its sound output cleanly by using the operating system (XBIOS) and so should also run on Milan and Hades with a soundcard. It has been tested with Milanblaser and ES1371 PCI soundcards. There is still a bug inside so that it does not yet run with Magic, but MiNT+N.AES or SingleTOS work fine.

http://www.crosswinds.net/~thothy/atari/tetrax_e.html

STarCall 3.2A Released

A new release, 3.2A, of STarCall is available:

http://www.icc-computer.de/starcall

Milan II In Trouble

According to a statement on the Milan Computer homepage, the development of the Milan II has been discontinued because one highly relevant custom-chip, deeply integrated in the motherboard-design of the Milan II, is not being produced against all expectations.

Currently it is not decided yet whether to continue and develop a new board design or to focus on porting the MilanOS to other platforms.

The statement being referred to is currently only available in German.

http://www.milan-computer.de/de/news/news102000a.php3
(News item courtesy of atari.org)

Milan II News..

Translated by Bob King - Copied from C.S.A.ST Newsgroup

"Kiel, the 10,10,2000 statement to the Milan II

Weeks and months it was quite calm almost around the Milan II. Last large appearance and associated, official messages took place on the Atari fair in June in Neuss.

Meanwhile many Milan fans are however in unrest guessed/advised, because they do not receive acknowledgements for the well-known erscheinungstermine of the Milan. Long time lasted it, until we could take position from the company Milan officially for current situation.

However the reason is that we did not want to publish wrong information, up to the day of yesterday (09.10.2000) no unique decision had met.

The Milan II

The targets of the Milan system were clearly outlined: It had a new board Design on base of the Milan I ago, which continues proven items in addition, brings substantial improvements with itself. So e.g. a AGP port or also the support of SDRAMs.

In the spring this yearly was again revised when desired the selling partner, which always transmitted an estimation market chances of the Milan to the computer enterprise, the concept. In order to go to any dependencies on driver manufacturers for diagram cards and sound cards out of the way and besides the Milan II in a compact housing to under-get be able, became decided, to integrate the components for diagram and sound on the Motherboard.

A first prototype of the Milan 060 was to be seen on the fair in Neuss.

Against expecting technical problems in-crept again and again, for whose

purpose even additional hardware designers were engaged.

The integration in particular the AGP port, in addition, the SDRAMs prepared hardware-technically under-waited difficulties, which could be solved however after viscous advancing in the late summer 2000. Just in this moment occurred what had to occur:

The manufacturer one of the two important log IC chips of the Milan (he takes over the complete emulation of the not existing Atari hardware) was adjusted despite contrary promises on the part of the manufacturer and is available neither in smaller numbers of items than remainder nor in large numbers of items than special production.

A shock for the Milan team, because a scarce year work was in this chip. An adequate, counterpart existed at the market, which can be adapted fast, dezeit not or could not be found yet.

Together with the selling company AXRO the situation in the late summer 2000 was discussed. Together with our distribution and interlocutor it came to the result that a small computer company, which does not manufacture quantities in hundred-out one hundred and abverkauft this problem could flower on a long-term basis again and again. And first considerations for adjustment the project were discussed in addition, put fast again ad acta!

The new OS

In this moment a project was drawn from the developer drawer, which Uwe cutter, Ali Goukassian, Michael Rockers and Thomas Goettsch had already prepared in November 1999 and had conceptionally [sic] held. It should be implemented actually only in one of the future stages of hardware production, in order to save time.

The speech is from a new operating system concept, which almost hardware independent a Atari TOS or a MagiC Milan could make thereby.

The new Milan OS, which differs technically far from the Atari TOS, because many areas of programming were structured new, is simply expressed structured as follows:

It consists of a depending on hardware and an independent layer. This step had to be carried out, in order to bring Atari programs on the new Milan hardware to running.

While the independent layer takes up the instruction e.g. for the access to sound, diagram or fixed disk, this instruction is interpreted and the depending on hardware layer, which transfers the actual access then transferred.

Thus it should be ensured that easy modifications in the hardware (Milan I - > Milan II) at few expenditure to be adapted can.

MagiC Milan again was changed so much opposite the standard designs the fact that it does not make any own access more on the Milan hardware but transfers its "Wuensche " to the hardware to the Milan TOS. This step made the MagiC Milan development again independent of the Milan hardware.

The new operating system concept designates now a step, which was already initiated in similar courses by Apple with the new MacOS X or by Amiga Inc. for the new Betriebssytem (project name Elate):

Depending on hardware sections of the operating system Milan TOS by our developers against a Linux core one exchanges at present. This part of the operating system is not under any circumstances Atari typsch, but serves excluding the interpretation of the hardware accesses on the part of the operating system or the software.

Linux, a Unix derivative, is Freeware and by hundred-from one hundred of programmers is as well known developed further.

And Linux is today so far established that drivers for the access to USB interfaces, fixed disks, are Firewire interfaces, network cards etc. always briefly after appearance of the respective hardware or hardware standard available.

For the Milan crew it had meant in the past to develop drivers e.g. at all for responding the Milan USB port.

Owing to the new concept the Linux core is embodied however with the independent part of the Milan TOS. Places the Milan TOS or the software, which runs under it, a request of an interface, this is transferred over a standardized interpreter to the Linux core, which is at the edge mentioned also only a few KB large. This again already has all necessary drivers, which are world-wide freely available, in order to tie up any modern hardware (- standard) to the TOS.

Perspectives

The perspectives look today on the one hand well, on the other hand disappointing: The Milan II was put on ice. Months-long work, which swallowed thousands of D-mark is likewise triumphs, like the hope of many Atari users to be able to call a fast Milan II already soon their own. This is to be charged primarily to technical problems. In addition, beyond that the months-long is tried to also draw venture Capital societies (holding companies) from Germany in the boat in order to supplement the capital clearly, failed. In this country ones become at present primarily InterNet air things, which do not create anything within shortest time from that a fictitious million-value, which falls mostly however evenly so fast again into the depths, supported and from the baptism elevated. One that really few enterprises, which has to offer computer know-how and its own, small and operating system equipped with much software, however unfortunately saves the large risk, costs for the investors by materials production (Main board etc..) to cause.

But this means the end of the project with nieces. Milan computer system will offer, to all that, which would like today a Milan further the Milan I with 040er-Prozessor. And also the Upgrade card on the 060-Prozessor are to be had further and meanwhile. In fact at present thus nothing stands to the possession of a Milan with 060-Prozessor in the way.

The step, which is now done, is to be looked toward Milan III. And but at present two scenarios are to the selection, which build all together on the fact that the Milan TOS (and thus the essay MagiC Milan) already soon it is almost hardware independent could:

a. One decides for an Linux core adjustment on e.g. AMD hardware (Athlon, Duron) and standard board peripheral device. In the course its is selected a board, which imports only in this country be acquired must. Conditions are fulfilled like a large Flash EPROM. This can be still a TOS based computer, which starts directly from the chip. The arithmetic performance would grow with this solution proportionally to the assigned processor and

with a 400MHz-Chip the performance of a 060-Prozessors very far would already exceed.

b. One begins (if necessary own) a PPC G3/G4-Board, which is still closer to the 68060-Prozessor, so that starting from 350 MHz more than one doubling of the arithmetic performance was achieved here.

So that the TOS runs also under these processors, a 68k-Interpreter is integrated, which runs differently than Windows or MacOS based emulation, independently natively and a high arithmetic performance enabled.

For version b) a license partner was opened at present, which would sell 2001 maximum modern G3-PPC-Boards toward start to manufacture and as OEM product at Milan. Here it would be ensured that the computer altogether approximately 1700, - DM would cost. The negotiations run at present. The partner would not like to be called before contract drawing. Clear it is however that specifications were likewise kept such as diagram and sound on a min in OTHER board, like now even the binding of a network adapter and a bus clock of 100MHz.

The perspectives, which would offer one from the NOT already promptly transferred to implementing, are enormous:

The entire operating system will be still smaller approximately 2 MT and could be operated on processors such as AMD, Intel, PPC in addition, RISC, Aplha and Thosiba at a comparatively small expenditure.

Thus the Milan TOS with MagiC Milan becomes in nu one of the smallest, portable operating systems, with which the software (differently than e.g. with Windows CE) does not have again to be compiled, in order to run on different processors.

First versions of this new operating system symbiosis already had to be seen in October.

Result

Their confidence, dear customers, surely shrank in the course of the time, because you had to wait for a long time for an not appearing device. But a reproach, which one cannot make for Milan of computer system is that that in this house the things were not finished.

Because as only manufacturers Milan of computer system succeeded in bringing an executable 040/060-Computer to the price eligible for financing in circulation. With this step Milan succeeded in proving that here uncoordinated technique Freaks at working is not only, but that concepts and clear lines can be transferred also up to ready for the market ones.

Herein the enterprise differs from numerous companies, which let intelligent and talentierte headings operate senselessly for many years, without supplying results.

The Linux core idea, which trusted to transfer itself the team not promptly to be in order not to stop the Milan II according to schedule, seems the only load-carrying solution. It nevertheless gave always considers, whether could succeed, a 80MHz-Computer to intersperse and also whether it would be enough to use a main processor become outdated technologically hopelessly as the 68060.

These concerns are extinguished with an impact. The Milan could live on

already soon on efficient platforms and let the operating system on competitive hardware, loved by us, continue.

In particular the perspective to receive G3/G4-Boards wakes nevertheless many hopes, because such a computer would not only underline the breath of the non-standard one - it would arouse world-wide much interest.

And this way seems also economical to be more lucrative, because nevertheless now no hardware production connected with high risks must be carried. The developers can itself on an area - the operating system - concentrate. And so it is only one question of the time, until the new Milan III can be on our desks.

Realistic estimates to the consequence this Æt until 2nd quarter 2001 the case could be. But as said: Then as super modern hardware.

And up to then there are the MilanI - 060 for all those, which would not like to do already today without speed.

We ask for your understanding for the fact that we decided us not to produce an outdated hardware standard in the long run but the expenditure on capital assets amounts to some million German Marks. And even if you, dear Atari fans and we know that 80MHz are sufficient, in order Atari software with highest speed to operate - one will be able to put this not close to the mass of the computer people.

If one intersperses the Milan TOS (project name TOS 6) in the future however as "Easy Computing Environment " - thus a working environment for simple computers which can be served -, in which it runs on some platforms. Additionally now also still another its own reference hardware on base of a non-standard power PC system offers, then one has a real chance by the world public of the computer-interested users and media to be considered. We could learn that in the course of the passed months.

In the future we will inform you - there we know the route of march of the Milan know - again regularly about the events both in the InterNet and about the publications.

Its Ali Goukassian and the Milan team "

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING

compiled by Joe Mirando
jmirando@portone.com

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. You may have seen the headline already, but I’ve got bad news for you about the Milan II. Remember that one? Yep. It’s been announced that, as your local car salesman would say, "it just ain’t gonna happen." Look around the issue for the info.

A quick announcement about Team Atari: The SETI@home search group... we’re now up to 41 members who have contributed a total of twenty-seven and a half years of CPU time analyzing 16868 data units looking for a

signal from an extraterrestrial intelligence. Unfortunately there isn't a program available for the ST to do this, but anyone who's got a PC or Mac can join up and have their computer search for ET in its spare time. You can find all the info at http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu/ . You can find the latest stats for Team Atari at http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu/cgi-bin/cgi?cmd=team_lookup&name=team atari . Stop by and see who's doing what in Team Atari!

Y'know, it doesn't strike me as quite fair that our publisher gets to see my column early every week. I mean, that way he gets to comment on what I've written and I don't get a chance to reply... well, not for a week anyway.

There's only one way I can think of to get around it. That's for me to do the editing from now on. That means that Dana will just turn in a column every week, and I'll do all the hunting around and fishing for news and putting the whole damned thing together and make sure that everyone who's supposed to get a copy gets one.

Naaaahhh.... I'll let him see my column first.... if that's the way he really wants it. <grin>

Seriously folks, Dana and I have been friends for so long that we play off of each other almost effortlessly. There have been times when Dana has written his editorial and mentioned something that I, unbeknownst to him, had also mentioned in my column. There have been a few times when we've both had to sit back and scratch our heads. We do have "unspoken ground-rules" though... No politics, no off-color jokes, and no personal attacks. We've done okay so far. Now all that remains is for one of us to hit the lottery for some major money and go around buying all of the patents to Atari computer hardware.

Got that Lotto ticket Dana?? <grin>

Okay, let's get to the UseNet stuff.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup

Bob King posts:

"My big boss, The Assistant Comptroller of Patents, was one of the judges at a competition run by the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council for the best Web Page Design by UK schools. 250 schools took part. I could not view the winner as I do not have the plug-in, but please look at the runner up at:

http://www.epsrc-sciencerace.net/schools/534121/

My question is: is there any Wizard etc software or even combination of software on the atari com platform that could do anything remotely like this. If the answer is as I expect, then it puts in focus how far we are behind in Web technology with the Atari."

Editor's note: For those of you who can't view the page, it's a pretty neat intro "movie" with moving text and some fairly nice graphics. It's "eye-candy" of course, but it's okay if that's what you want to showcase.

Chris Simon tells Bob:

"Sure we're behind the times, but is that a bad thing??

The whole point of the web is that it is accessible to everyone regardless of what platform they use, what hardware spec they have and even what type of device they view it on.

What *is* "Web Page Design"? Is it a case of making something look nice, or making something usable and useful?

Stick to the guidelines of HTML and we have everything on the Atari platform that allows the development of good web sites. It requires skill, talent, imagination and flair to make a site look good AND useful. That's what it's all about, rather than the ability to use tools such as Flash which rely on a certain spec of machine on the client.

I'm also an advocate of server-side processing, as opposed to client-side."

"Galen" adds:

"If you are asking about the useless 30 second intro, I'd say that you would have to link ray traced images together into a movie. As for the website behind the intro, it's pretty standard stuff -- an Atari should have no trouble."

Tony Cianfaglione asks about a utility:

"Is there a program (possibly accessory) the forces whatever frame (box) the mouse rolls over to become the highlighted frame? Moving folders from background frames won't work until that frame becomes the main highlighted frame and so you need to click on the background frame to bring it forward prior to moving the folder. I wonder if there is a program that would automatically do this. I thought I read somewhere it was possible."

Bob King tells Tony:

"There are several, I have sent one called 'SafeMenu'. Here's an extract from the read.me file:

'Select Safemenu's panel in XCONTROL to configure menu behaviour and mouse speed:

Normal: Menus behave like they would without Safemenu.

Pulldown: Menus behave like on an Apple Macintosh. To select a menu item, click on the menu title and move to the item while keeping the mouse button pressed. Release the mouse button to select the item.

Right button: The mouse pointer can only be moved into the menu bar when the right mouse button is pressed.

Half menu: A menu drops down only when the mouse pointer touches the upper half of the menu title.'

the correct prog. is called 'Mauswind'. Here's an extract

from the readme file:

When Maus-Window is active and the mouse-cursor resides over a non-active window, the window will automatically be topped. This is achieved by simulating a mouse-click using the AES-call appl_tplay(). This confors to GEM and causes no problems with "clean" applications (see section 4 for a description of problematic programs)."

Someone who didn't leave their name asks about Link vs. Link II:

"What are the differences between ICD's Link and the Link 2?

I know the link doesn't support parity but what are the other differences?"

Hallvard Tangeraas tells him/her:

"The Link 2 has a red LED which shows that it's switched on and working. Apart from that, both units look the same as far as I know."

Galen adds:

"My Link 1 has handled everything I've thrown at it so far, including CD-ROMS and a scanner. The Link 1 can't handle parity, but most drives don't care anymore or have a jumper available.

I suspect the Link 1 and 2 are rather similar overall, but I'm merely guessing. I know that the Link 1 works quite well for most, if not all, non-parity devices."

James Haslam asks about Audio CDs:

"I've just replaced Extendos with Spin! v0.34. All works brilliantly, including LFNs and I can access a Windoze95 cd I couldn't before.

However I've got a question.:

When I put an audio CD in, Spin!'s doc mentions being able to get .WAV files for each track and PRG files to play them. However I only see the latter.

I think that this is something to do with the BOS driver (I'm using Spin!'s SPIN_SD.BOS). Unless it's to do with the hardware in the CD-Rom.

On a PC at work, NT-Explorer sees .cda files (only 100 or so bytes in size) which I assume is the equivalent of the PRGs (I think this is done by the BOS driver), and not .WAV also.

I'm looking to convert a track from audio CD to MPEG (either on Atari or PC) for a musician friend's website http://www.impala.co.uk (legal for his CD), so can someone suggest a program either on PC or Atari that will enable me to copy a WAV format track from CD?

BTW, I've also got hold of a Cumana CD Rom (external) that is supposed to be SCSI, but the cable that comes out of it doesn't have a normal SCSI-1 or 2 plug on it (I think it was originally used on an Amiga) anyone know if I can use it?"

Shiuming Lai tells James:

"The latest version of ExtenDOS displays WAV as well.

Depending on which version you have, you might be able to use the free updater.

The CD audio utility from ExtenDOS will export as AVR, AIFF and WAV. I think Alexander Clauss' CD Player will also do these, and has more sample rates as well (though ExtenDOS' CDAudio program will create all sample rates to match Atari-specific ones such as in the STE or Falcon)."

Steve Sweet asks James:

"Why did you do that, Extendos 3.3 works perfectly here LFN's and all. and i can access Pox ridden CD's as well."

Julian Reschke (the author of SPIN!)jumps in and adds:

"The XFS displays the WAV files if (and only if) the BOS driver allows it to read digital audio data. SPIN_SD supports this for a lot of drives, but maybe not for the one you have."

Henrik Gildå posts:

"After having installed STinG 1.26, I experience a much slower transfer than before. Connecting to my ISP I usually get a 33600bit connection, and transfers should be about 3300 bytes/sec after that, which is what I achieved with an earlier STinG version. Now I get around 1800bytes/sec. I've tried altering the TCP-settings in the corresponding CPX, but that gives no noticeable effect.

I have these parameters:
MTU: 1500
Window size: 20000
TTL: 128
RTT: 0.050

The RTT was at 1.500 first, but I tried changing it to 0.050, because it was like that in the earlier version, but it didn't make any difference.

Does anyone know the 'correct' values of these parameters, or anything else besides this that I should change?"

John Garone tells Henrik:

"My settings below:
If they make things worse, I'll change mine to yours :)
Note: MTU is set in the Dialer
      Recv Window is set in StinG's Default.CFG
      I only use Sting Internals CPX and Serial Ports CPX
      Delay 15/20 (CPX) = Threading (CFG)

```
#  Used by the STinG kernel :
#
ALLOCMEM    = 250000
#
ACTIVATE    = TRUE
THREADING   = 15
FRAG_TTL    = 60
#
#
```

```
#  Used for ICMP protocol :
#
ICMP_GMT    = -60
ICMP_AD     = 10
ICMP_FLAG   = 0
#
#
#  Used for UDP protocol :
#
UDP_PORT    = 1024
UDP_ICMP    = 1
#
#
#  Used for TCP protocol :
#
TCP_PORT    = 1024
MSS         = 1460
RCV_WND     = 10000
DEF_RTT     = 1500
DEF_TTL     = 64
TCP_ICMP    = 1
#
#
#  Used by the DNS resolver :
#
#  Note that the first one of these three will not normally be used.
#  It will only be used when an address consisting of a single word
#  is used in a URI.  The DOMAIN value is then appended to complete
#  the URI as needed for the nameserver request packets.
#  (I still recommend using full URIs instead, to avoid confusion.)
#
DOMAIN      =
DNS_CACHE   = 64
DNS_SAVE    = TRUE
#                                                                       "
```

Chris Thorley asks about using games with TOS 2.06:

"Can anyone advise me on how to get some of my old games running now I’ve upgraded to TOS2.06. I have an autobooting hard drive system but want to run some of my old games from the ’A:’ drive, the type that bypass GEM."

Steve Stupple tells Chris:

"OOOh! lovely subject:)

You didn’t mention what model Atari you are wanting to run it on!

There are some ways around awkward games, ideally if they will run within GEM you have a better chance:)

9 times 0f 10 the games etc. fail due to the copy protection techniques employed, RNC protection is a typical and may not run on an STE even when stated; RNC protections can also fail due to some disk drives!

The only way to get these type of programs running is by removing/bypassing the protection. I’m not sure if hardware like Multiface ST may be of use here!

The first I would is find out if the software is a STOS game or not, if

it is then use something like STOS fix to patch the software to work on YOUR machine.

The other method is to load a disk based TOS, I use 1.09, this usually does the trick, I've used this method on some really hard to run software, software that FAIL to run on any STFM/STE TOS and was suppose to be a TOS program (not runable from outside the AUTO folder!)."

Mark Bedingfield jumps in and posts:

"TOS 1.09? Don't know that one. Does this work on the Mega STE? I have also heard rumours of TOS 4.92 that was supposed to be development for TOS 5. Does anyone know where this is available?"

Steve Stupple tells Mark:

"I think you'l find its TOS 1.62, some software reports the TOS version incorrectly due to the way Atari wrote the standards and then broke them. You probably have TOS 2.06 in your MegaSTE anyway, which is the equivalent."

Well folks, that's it for this week. Tune in again next week, same time, same station, and be ready to listen to what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - NYKO 'Blob Light"! More eGames!
Sega Takes Advantage of Sony!
'NBA Live 2001' More 'Spyro'!
And much more!

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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

Dreamcast Sales Climb on Eve of Troubled PlayStation 2 Launch

Game players and retailers may be frustrated by the expected shortages of Sony's upcoming PlayStation 2 console, but at least one party is benefiting: Sega.

Sega's Dreamcast game console has been trounced in sales by Sony's original PlayStation all year. But Sega is staging a comeback, with sales more than doubling ahead of the launch of the much-anticipated PlayStation

2, according to market research firm PC Data, which tracks retail sales of technology products.

The surge in Dreamcast sales is significant, given that many had written off Sega's long-term prospects in light of the massive hype surrounding the launch of the new Sony console later this month. Sega appears to have capitalized on the chance Sony provided when it warned last month that initial PlayStation 2 availability would be half that of previous forecasts, likely leading to widespread shortages during the holiday shopping season.

Sales of the Dreamcast consoles were up 156.6 percent between July 23 and Sept. 30, according to PC Data, pushing Sega into the No. 2 spot, ahead of Nintendo and behind Sony, based on revenue.

Sega of America president Peter Moore told CNET News.com shortly after Sony's announcement that the company was already hearing from retailers looking for more Dreamcasts.

"It created a mild panic among retailers," he said. "As the brand that takes advantage of this best, it's our job to find the inventory."

To be sure, Sony will still dominate the market when the PlayStation 2 arrives, given that the console is essentially already sold out through preorders and reservations.

But Sega has been preparing itself for the Oct. 26 arrival of PlayStation 2, slashing prices on its Dreamcast by $50, to $150--half the price of the PlayStation 2. Further, Sega has been offering a rebate for the full cost of the Dreamcast to buyers who sign up for the Seganet online gaming network and Internet service.

These moves, coupled with Sony's component-related supply problems, have sent Dreamcast sales surging.

"The PlayStation 2 is pretty much already sold out," said Matt Gravett, of PC Data. "It's like when people go to the movie theater and can't get into their first-choice movie because it's sold out. They go to another movie."

Sony is currently selling a revamped version of its original PlayStation, dubbed "PSone," while Nintendo has been bundling its Nintendo 64 with Pokemon and Donkey Kong games.

"It really looks like Sega reached the part of the market that was looking to buy a new system," Gravett said. "They added to the market."

Since Sega cut prices, its market share has increased to 29.9 percent of unit sales and 39.7 percent by revenues. With the original PlayStation, Sony has 49 percent of the market in unit sales and 42.3 percent by revenue. The Nintendo 64 declined to 20.8 percent by unit sales and 17.9 percent by revenue.

From January through August, Sega captured about 15 percent of the market, according to Gravett. The PlayStation took 45 to 50 percent of the market during that time, and Nintendo had 30 to 35 percent.

The overall market for game consoles is still growing, Gravett said, despite the fact that many people are waiting for the PlayStation 2 and retailers are working to clear stores of original PlayStation inventory. Sega sales, while higher than earlier this year, are still lower than last

fall, when the Dreamcast launched, he said.

"The big thing this holiday season is going to be the PlayStation 2," Gravett said. "There could be some backlash against Sony because there are going to be some shortages."

Video Gamers Look Past Holiday for Hot Trends

Christmas 2000? Bah humbug, say video game companies who are already looking past this holiday season to spot the popular trends that will foster the hottest game titles for 2001 and beyond.

In the $8 billion-a-year industry, top game developer companies THQ Inc., Electronics Arts Inc. and Activision Inc. must predict which games and consoles fickle teen-agers will clamor for a year ahead of time.

Because games can take from six months to several years to develop, companies try to nab licenses for sports stars and hot brand names. Spotting trends can be risky but lucrative, as one hit can turn an average season into a championship one.

Tony Hawk, for example, became a synonym for skateboarding when he landed the world’s first 900-degree turn (a 2-1/2 turn) in competition last June. His new fame proved convenient for Activision, which was just then putting the finishing touches on an extreme sports game named after Hawk.

‘‘You have to anticipate trends, things that are just catching on from the trend setters to the mainstream, so by the time (the games) come out they will be full blown in the mainstream," said Kathy Vrabeck, Activision’s executive vice president of global brand management.

A hit game usually means not just a surge in sales, but also a boost for a company’s stock price as trend-spotting investors look to scoop up a company’s shares. Likewise, just one dud can sour investors.

Games that developers most enjoy -- the original themed ones -- can be risky, but they also are some of the most successful due to their originality, such as Eidos Plc’s Tomb Raider, which has inspired its own movie.

Gamers also have to keep abreast of pending new high-tech consoles, including Microsoft’s touted Xbox, available in fall 2001, Nintendo Co.’s GAMECUBE system next year and Sony’s Playstation 2, due for a tapered down U.S. release in late October and in Europe in late November.

Some successes are no-brainers, like Activision’s rights to make games based on Marvel Comics heroes or THQ’s license to make games using professional wrestling characters, captured before World Wrestling Federation antics caught on.

The world’s largest independent video game developer, Electronic Arts generally has the most financial muscle to secure popular themes. EA just secured the license to develop a game based on the popular ‘‘Harry Potter" children’s books.

Games are typically subject to close scrutiny by focus groups -- basically, lucky kids who come into the game maker’s offices to test out new games.

THQ bounces game ideas off retailers, whose suggestions led to its 3D bass fishing game.

But trend predicting is never a sure thing, and sometimes duds fall through the cracks.

THQ’s ‘‘Shaq Fu" for Game Boy -- in which the L.A. Lakers basketball star battles opponents using martial arts -- proves how even hot names like Shaquille O’Neal may not sell outside their familiar setting. Another example is the company’s never released ‘‘Michael Jordan: Chaos in the Windy City," in which the athlete hurls basketballs at bad guys in hometown Chicago.

Sometimes a good concept is released on the wrong player, like THQ’s Tiger Woods on the Game Boy, which saw disappointing sales because the platform’s generally younger audiences are not usually golf aficionados. Electronic Arts holds licenses for the golf star on other consoles.

THQ’s cross-town Los Angeles-area rival Activision also has seen failures, like when it misfired in predicting an audience for a reprisal of the company’s famous ‘‘Space Invaders." A nostalgic game fad had already faded and a new generation of gamers were not impressed by the several decades-old graphics.

A game that fails to meet expectations can hurt not just a company’s image but its stock price, in a world where both video game players and financial analysts can be brutal.

‘‘The fate of one or two games can make or break a company," said Frank O’Connor, editor in chief of video game and entertainment Web site DailyRadar.com. ‘‘It’s totally subjective on what makes a hit. There’s no star power to drag people in."

So, many companies prefer to play it safe, offering sequels to popular titles and long-standing popular themes. Electronic Arts, is making its 15th version of its popular John Madden football game, O’Connor said.

But latching onto a celebrity, a hot movie or trendy toy is not enough to make a hit. Games must be fun to play.

‘‘Kids these days are so sophisticated," Germaine Gioia, THQ licensing director, said. ‘‘First and foremost you need to make quality games. If it’s your favorite television show or movie and you have all the pajamas and umbrellas but the game doesn’t play well, that resounds pretty quickly in terms of sales."

New consoles with faster playing speeds and richer video quality also demand higher quality games.

‘‘We’re moving to new hardware, so it’s more about game play than brands now. Games that showcase the technology will cater to people that own the new systems, the more hard-core users," Activision’s Vrabeck said.

Another trend helping the industry expand is the boom in younger players. Video game companies are now making games that can be played by increasingly electronic-literate children as young as 5 years old.

‘‘Traditionally we made and marketed to 12 to 14 year-olds but as systems became older and less expensive, they can appeal to larger markets," THQ’s Gioia said. The big brother or sister passes the system to a younger

sibling."

Play Game Boy in the Dark ... If You Dare! Monstrous New Personality Oozes From Game Boy Color, Thanks to NYKO's Ingenious Blob Light

The creature looming deep within your video game has come to life, and it's engulfing Game Boy Color and Game Boy Pocket -- just in time for Halloween.

NYKO Technologies Inc., a privately held marketer of innovative game accessory products, introduces another lifetime light source for Game Boy in addition to its illustrious top-selling Worm Light. With the Blob Light(TM), which resembles a monster-like mass of slime, Game Boy takes on a new distinct personality that will leave gamers wondering if they dare play in the dark.

''The Blob Light is unique in that it essentially brings to life an ordinary electronics piece. Suddenly, Game Boy Color and Game Boy Pocket have a distinct personality," said Robert Rienick, vice president sales and marketing, NYKO. ''The Blob Light is also intriguing in that it can be seen as something different to everyone -- fun and frightening."

The compact, portable and adjustable Blob Light comes in two colors, purple and green. The Blob Light molds to the Game Boy Color extension port and provides a clear ''white light" illumination that covers the entire Game Boy screen, without distortion, vividly bringing out the colors of the LCD screen.

The Blob Light's patented white light technology draws a very small amount of power from the existing power supply and does not require any additional batteries. Ideal for game play in all low-light conditions (in an airplane, in a car, under the covers at night), the patented adjustable white light illuminates Game Boy screens for better visibility.

The Blob Light is made of a durable, yet flexible material that is robust enough to stand up to its menacing design.

''The Blob Light, like the Worm Light, provides a solution to a need within the gaming industry for a better light source for Game Boy," Rienick said. ''We expect the Blob Light to be just as sought-after as the Worm Light because of its simplicity, its efficiency and its playful appearance."

The Blob Light (MSRP $14.99) will be available domestically and internationally at retail chains such as Best Buy, Target, Babbages, Software Etc., FuncoLand, Toys 'R' Us, K-Mart, Sears, Circuit City, Electronic Boutique, Kay Bee Toys, Wal-Mart, Fry's Electronics and Rhino Video Games.

Spyro: Year of the Dragon Heats Up the Holiday Season on the PlayStation

Sony Computer Entertainment America announced the nationwide release of Spyro: Year of the Dragon, available exclusively for the new PS one console and the PlayStation game console. The third installment of the popular,

multi-million-unit selling, Spyro the Dragon franchise, Spyro: Year of the Dragon combines the signature style of the first two games in the series with a new cast of characters and a variety of new gameplay elements, delivering the most exciting adventure in the series yet!

Spyro: Year of the Dragon features four all-new playable characters, 30 completely new worlds and more than 37 levels in all. The game boasts a wide variety of mini-games-including skateboarding and boxing-hidden within the levels, as well as a slew of mini-bosses that will test the mettle of our fire-breathing friend.

Developed and designed by Insomniac Games and produced in association with Cerny Games, produced by Universal Interactive Studios and published by Sony Computer Entertainment America, Spyro: Year of the Dragon is an extension of the first true, free-roaming 3D action platform game for the PlayStation game console.

‘‘Spyro: Year of the Dragon is the best game in the series yet," said Ami Blaire, director, product marketing, Sony Computer Entertainment America. ‘‘Gamers will certainly appreciate the true signature style gameplay of the Spyro the Dragon series, but this time, they will also enjoy new playable critters and completely new and more challenging gameplay elements."

Since 1998, the combined Spyro franchises have sold over 3.2 million copies in the U.S. and over four million copies worldwide. Spyro: Year of the Dragon maintains all the key elements of the popular hit series by providing strong fundamental gameplay, broadly appealing characters, entertaining lip-synched animation and a friendly learning curve that will appeal to gamers of all ages and skill levels.

In Spyro: Year of the Dragon, Spyro and Sparx are back and ready to take on an eggs-cellent new adventure! Every twelve years, the Dragon Kingdom celebrates its most coveted event: the ‘‘Year of the Dragon" Festival. As the celebration begins, fairies deliver a new batch of 150 dragon eggs, and dragons come from all around to dance and feast until everyone drops from ... eggs-haustion.

Unbeknownst to the dragons, however, a sinister plot is hatching somewhere far away -- on the opposite side of the world -- in the kingdom long since forgotten by dragonkind. So forgotten, in fact, that even the legends about these ‘‘Forgotten Worlds" have now been forgotten. This kingdom is ruled by an evil Sorceress who has frankly, become quite fed up with being forgotten. Sitting on her forgotten throne, the Sorceress has hatched a fiendish plan. A plan to restore the fading magic to her forgotten realm. A plan to conquer the dragons once and for all. All she needs is a little help from her army of horn-nosed ’Rhynocs’, the cooperation of her mysterious disciple Bianca and of course, those 150 magical dragon eggs.

The kidnapped dragon eggs have been scattered by the Sorceress throughout the four Forgotten Worlds. Now it’s up to Spyro and Sparx to recover all of the dragon eggs and restore peace and harmony to Dragon Shores. Along the way, Spyro must enlist the help of his new critter pals, including Bentley the Yeti, Sheila the kangaroo, Sergeant Byrd, a flying penguin and Agent 9, an intelligent lab-monkey!

* Key features in Spyro: Year of the Dragon include:
* Exciting single-player action-platform adventure
* Challenging new gameplay with a deeper and more complex dynamic that will keep gamers enthralled as they explore more than 30 completely new worlds

* Experience totally new mini-games: boxing, skateboarding, sharp-shooting and more
* All-new Critter challenges offer a whole new level of gameplay. Four brand new playable Critters you control, each with their own special abilities to solve puzzles, accomplish new tasks and to come to the player’s aid when fighting Bosses
* The return of favorite characters including Spyro, Sparx, Hunter, the Professor and Moneybags, along with a mysterious new Sorceress, Bianca and tons of new Critters
* All-new vehicles and moves: go deep underwater in a submarine, drive a tank, ride a speedboat, pilot a hovercraft and launch to new heights with a rocket
* Power-ups galore! Pick up tons of treasure, super-charge your flame, spit, speed, gain extra lives and other bonus treats
* Completely new structure for the Speed Rounds - the classic Adventure mode contains all new power ups including rockets and turbo. The new Race modes challenge players to race against opponents for hours of fun

The independent Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB) rates Spyro: Year of the Dragon ‘‘E" for ‘‘Everyone."

Take-Two Interactive’s Rockstar Games Proudly Announces the Approval of Midnight Club for the Playstation 2 Computer Entertainment System for Launch

Rockstar Games, Take Two Interactive Software, Inc.’s high end video game publishing division, is pleased to announce the approval of Midnight Club, the highly anticipated off-road adventure game for the PlayStation2 by Sony Computer Entertainment America for release at the system’s launch on October 26, 2000. All elements of Midnight Club final code, packaging, and marketing materials have been approved.

‘‘We are thrilled that Midnight Club has been approved by Sony Computer Entertainment America for the launch of PlayStation 2 on October 26th, stated Paul Eibeler, president of Take-Two Interactive. "Being at the launch of PlayStation 2 with two potential, new gaming franchises in Smuggler’s Run and Midnight Club, is a clear example of the growth this company has achieved over the past year and are the games that will help continue to establish this company as a force to be reckoned with.‘‘ "To have two titles, Midnight Club and Smuggler’s Run available at launch is a landmark achievement for Rockstar games,‘‘ said Sam Houser, president of Rockstar Games. "The combined efforts and hard work of the teams at Angel Studios and Rockstar Games has put us in a position to become a major player at the launch of Playstation 2.‘‘

Midnight Club: Street Racing is a game based around illegal street racing. Players drive performance enhanced cars around busy city streets until they are challenged by another member of the illusive Midnight Club, and race at breakneck speeds through the city. Set in realistic, incredibly detailed, three-dimensional models of the world’s greatest cities, Midnight Club: Street Racing will feature single and multiplayer modes, many different vehicles and some of the greatest car tuning shops in the world. Midnight Club is due for release on October 26th on PlayStation 2.

EA Ships NBA LIVE 2001 for the PlayStation

The Best Selling Basketball Series of All-Time Takes It Strong to the Hoop Again

Electronic Arts ("EA") announced it is shipping NBA LIVE 2001 for the PlayStation, the latest offering in the most successful basketball series of all-time. The seventh edition in the ultra-realistic series, EA SPORTS NBA LIVE 2001 allows gamers to control the post or fly high above the rim with many new moves and features. NBA LIVE 2001 goes hard to the rack, delivering more emotion and atmosphere for a complete NBA experience.

‘‘I am proud to be associated with a product like NBA LIVE 2001 and it’s really nice to be featured on the cover," said Minnesota Timberwolves star forward Kevin Garnett. ‘‘I’ve been playing this game since way back and I think with the new inside game and the hot new NBA Challenge, LIVE 2001 may be my favorite yet."

NBA LIVE 2001 features the all new NBA Challenge that invites gamers to take on numerous gameplay contests such as, win by ten, record a triple double or drill three consecutive treys. Points are recorded upon completion of each challenge, with these points going towards a huge inventory of awards including, a West Coast one-on-one court, create-a-player features and player rating bonuses. NBA Challenge adds a whole new wrinkle to each game and gives users something to strive for in addition to a ‘‘W".

Ever wanted to do an ‘‘up and under" move on Tim Duncan and throw one down with authority? With NBA Live 2001 it’s totally possible, at least on the PlayStation. An all new inside game, with new animations and motion capture done by Kevin Garnett, give gamers a realistic feeling of contact and battling for position in the post. Basic turn around jumpers will become just one move in an arsenal of ‘‘go to" post moves including spin moves, hook shots and fade away jumpers. New inside moves make finishing the offense in the post more fun and more realistic than ever!

‘‘Gameplay and feature-wise we think NBA LIVE 2001 is the most complete basketball game ever," said executive producer Stan Chow. ‘‘We think that users will love the new inside moves and the NBA Challenge. We are also very happy with the new transitions, color commentary and play-by-play and think this give users the sensation of being not only at an NBA game, but on the court firing jumpers with the pros."

NBA LIVE 2001 Features

* New Transitions enhance in-game sequences and add to the drama of being on-court and part of the action. See player’s personalities and emotions come out on the court as they interact with each other, encourage teammates, and debate calls with the referees.
* Improved speech and sound effects capture the essence of the interaction between the play-by-play and color commentators. Bob Elliott adds new in-depth play analysis. All new color commentary provides for more intelligent and relevant interaction with game play-by-play done once again by veteran Don Poier.
* NBA All-Star and Olympic gold medallist Kevin Garnett was motion-captured performing a series of high-flying dunks and post moves that are featured in the game.
* A cutting-edge soundtrack with the widest array of hip-hop and rap

songs ever available in the LIVE series, including Universal recording artist Montell Jordan who wrote and performed the games title track, ‘‘Unstoppable," spice up the LIVE 2001 soundtrack.

* More than 50 of the greatest NBA legends. Gamers can compete against five All-Star teams from the 50’s, 60’s, 70’s, 80’s and 90’s to find out just how well today’s young superstars match-up against the stars of yesteryear. Users can also play one-on-one on an outdoor court using current NBA players or legendary players. The classic match-ups are endless.
* Create-a-Player allows gamers the ability to create custom players with individual features including player attributes, skill ratings and appearance.

NBA LIVE 2001 is rated ‘‘E" (Everyone) and will ship October 10. LIVE 2001 is analog controller compatible and supports up to eight players. Consumers may purchase the game directly at the EA Store (http://www.eastore.ea.com), for a suggested retail price of $39.95.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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New Letter to Attorney General - Reply to eGames

October 11, 2000

Mr. Robert M. Rayner, Analyst
Public Inquiry Unit, Department of Justice
California Office of the Attorney General
P.O. Box 944255
Sacramento, CA 94244-2550

RE: Case B-005834-2000

Dear Mr. Rayner,

I have today received a copy of a letter from Ms. Ellen Pulver Flatt of eGames, Inc. It is addressed to you and it is dated September 28, 2000. While I do have respect for Ms. Flatt’s professional reply, there are some points to be made of her correspondence.

First, Ms. Flatt acknowledges that multiple video games have been produced and sold in California by eGames in different forms by the same name. "Tunnel Blaster", for instance, was originally sold as a 30-level game. The company then re-marketed by the same name in different packaging having only 7 levels. The fact that the re-marketed version was so much shorter was not made known to the consumer on the packaging. I have recently purchased the full game if you would like to review either or both editions.

Within the gaming industry, shorter video games are called "playable demos". EGames is quite aware of the meaning of "demos". In fact, the packaging for "Galaxy of Arcade Classics" invites consumers to visit their web site to

download free demos. Traditionally, companies do not charge customers to play highly truncated versions of their full product.

Mr. Gerald Klein is the company's Chief Executive Officer (CEO). He argued with me that his company did not label the abridged version as being a demo. Therefore, it is not a demo. In fact, the re-marketed version of "Tunnel Blaster" is 78% shorter (the easiest levels) and fully playable in 15 minutes. The CEO made clear in his emails to me that this is an intentional marketing strategy of eGames that he refuses to change. He added that he keeps consumers pacified by offering a refund policy if they take the time to contact them. In truth, nothing in their packaging refers consumers to any such refund guarantee.

Of most concern, is the fact the CEO of eGames sent an email to Ms. Flatt that asked her to investigate what options the company had to sue me for having filed a complaint with the Office of the Attorney General of California. I trust that the Office of the Attorney General does not think highly of businesses who threaten lawsuits against customers simply for filing complaints.

My guess is that Ms. Flatt might explain that the CEO's threat was intended to be an inside joke and that I was not an intended recipient. The fact that the company has offered no apology even long after I let them know that I received it is a strong indication that it was an intended threat. I also question what type of company thinks that such comments from their CEO are humorous in any way.

I value your feedback in this matter and I look forward to providing any materials, data or information that you may require.

Respectfully,
<signed>
Donald A. Thomas, Jr.

cc: file

Ms. Ellen Pulver Flatt
Senior Associate Counsel
EGames, Inc.
2000 Cabot Boulevard West, #110
Langhorne, PA 19047-1811

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Napster Usage Increases Over 500 Percent

Napster's legal issues are not deterring people from using the service to download music. In fact, according to market research firm Media Metrix,

Napster usage has grown an incredible 506.8 percent since February 2000. In terms of users, 1.1 million people used the service in February 2000, growing to 6.7 million users in August 2000.

Usage of the music-swapping service grew more than 30 percent from July to August 2000, both at home and at work. The report states that 8.5 percent of people used the Napster application from home in August 2000, up from 1.4 percent in February 2000.

In Napster's latest court appearance, Judges questioned both sides about the pros and cons of the injunction, which Napster believes focuses on its ability -- or lack thereof -- to distinguish between music that is copyrighted and music that isn't. But the judges pressed particularly hard on the record industry to defend several major points.

Judge Robert Beezer said he found "extremely troublesome" allegations that Napster was responsible for the activities of its members, since Napster cannot know if they are illegally distributing copyrighted material.

Napster chief executive Hank Barry expressed hope that "we'll be able to resolve this case outside the judicial process." Napster has proposed it would start charging consumers around $5 a month to download copyrighted music files, but the recording industry has rejected such an offer, saying it doesn't go far enough.

Court Sets Microsoft Appeal Date

A federal appellate court set oral arguments in the Microsoft antitrust case for Feb. 26-27, splitting the difference between what the government and the company proposed.

The computer software giant is appealing a District Court ruling that would split it into two separate companies.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia also ordered on Wednesday that the company's first brief be filed by Nov. 27 with the government's reply due Jan. 12. The company's rebuttal is due Jan. 29.

Seeking to speed up the case, the government had sought a Nov. 1 deadline for the company's first brief, completion of all briefs by Dec. 22 and oral arguments in January.

Microsoft had sought a much slower schedule than that. The company had proposed its first brief be due two months after the court set a schedule, which would have been Dec. 11. The company's proposed schedule had called for final briefs to be filed five months after the order, which would be March 11, with oral arguments later still.

The court limited the company's first brief to 150 pages, the federal government's reply to 125 pages and the reply from state governments, which also sued the company, to 25 pages. The company's final rebuttal was limited to 75 pages.

The court advised the parties that it ''does not assume that length necessarily equates with quality."

The government and the company had also battled over brief size, and the

court may have split the difference there too.

Microsoft had wanted 56,000 words for its opening brief; the government had proposed 24,000 words. The court's normal limit is 14,000 words.

Court Clerk Mark Langer could not say Wednesday how many words would fit on a page under the font size and margin limits set by the court. But a legal source, requesting anonymity, said the rules should produce about 250 words per page, which would mean the opening brief would be 37,500 words.

Microsoft spokesman Jim Cullinan said the company was generally pleased with the schedule set by the court.

''This is certainly reasonable," Cullinan said. ''We believe this is a fair schedule and we look forward to presenting our arguments to the court."

Justice spokeswoman Chris Watney said, ''We're looking forward to presenting our case to the Court of Appeals."

If You Need Me, I'll Be at BlueLight

Forget the cute little ''i" that once was e-commerce companies' favorite appendage, and ditch the ''e" that was the hot prefix.

This fall's must-have media story is a look at the heartland marts, Kmart and Wal-Mart. With pure-play Net shopping sites looking as out-of-date as last year's pashmina, the media is trolling for cyber-hipness in the home of gigantic shopping carts and smart little acrylic sweaters.

AdWeek reports that Kmart's Internet unit, BlueLight.com, has scored success by first dropkicking the Kmart.com name and then the middle-America location (the unit is now located in Silicon Valley).

Kmart also got the bright idea to become an Internet service provider. According to AdWeek, it stacked piles of free CDs near checkout counters that give customers no-fee Net access, but there is a price to be paid: Customers are subjected to ads.

So far, the idea has worked. AdWeek reports BlueLight has notched 4 million subscribers, making it one of the top-five ISPs, and it also will peddle some 300,000 items, many of which will be available exclusively online. Some of the items, according to ABCNews.com, will be part of happy homemaker Martha Stewart's new line of too-hot housewares.

Mistress Martha's cutlery, dinnerware and pots and pans debut Friday on BlueLight and also in Kmart stores.

The question of the day is, will a yuppified online Kmart (can such a thing even exist?) leave Juber-rival Wal-Mart eating its dust? ABCNews.com quotes a Wal-Mart representative crowing that The Company That Sam Walton Built welcomes the competition.

But tell that to the reporters who covered the No. 1 retailer's decision to shutter Walmart.com ''for a few weeks." News.com is the only outlet to be understated in its account: "So far the company has failed to make a big splash online," it writes.

Other news organizations pile on the skepticism. Internet World calls Wal-Mart’s move to temporarily shut down the site "a less-than-Net-savvy approach to redesigning its Web site." Reuters raises an eyebrow and deems the temporary shutdown "highly unusual," questioning whether it suggests that a major change is underway or just that the company is having trouble with logistics.

Other outlets dance the analyst do-si-do. The Yankee Group’s Rebecca Nidositko tells InternetNews that the shutdown is a time ‘‘to create a more streamlined, well-defined online shopping service."

Internet World skips the feel-good session and prefers Jupiter Communications analyst Michele Rosenshein’s tsk-tsking of Walmart.com for missing a fat chunk of the holiday shopping season, which she says starts ‘‘6 to 8 weeks before November."

Then again, with $165 billion in sales last year, Wal-Mart isn’t exactly your standard pure-play e-commerce site. It can probably afford to lose a few weeks of online sales, as InternetNews points out.

And while the company may be tinkering with its clicks, other news from the Arkansas retailer this week indicates that it has the bricks part of the equation down pat. Next year, Wal-Mart will open 350 new stores, and the company trumpeted to the media that the expansion is its largest ever.

When you’re ringing up 40 million more square feet of retail space, who needs a little ‘‘i" or ‘‘e"?

Someone Has Invented Better Mouse

Microsoft can be a pain in the neck sometimes, but the Redmond, Wash., software giant has a new mouse that eases pains in the wrist - and looks way cool besides.

The Trackball Explorer is big - about 7 inches long, 4 inches wide and 2 inches high. Its size and curvilinear shape make it much more conformable than the average mouse and allow you to make larger movements. That eases the wrist pain mouse-jockeying often inflicts upon those of us old enough to remember something called a manual typewriter.

The trackball itself is a ruby red 2-inch ball surrounded by a glowing red ring. Although the ball feels smooth, below the surface is a pattern resembling little gears. That’s a key to the optical technology used to monitor the trackball.

Unlike a conventional mouse or trackball, where moving parts track the movements of the ball (which can become clogged or dirty), the only moving part here is the ball itself. A DSP (digital signal processor) is taking snapshots of the pattern on the trackball at the rate of 2,000 images per second. Those images are compared to determine movement. The hardware comparing the pictures is executing 16 million instructions per second, says Microsoft, about 12 times faster than an ordinary mouse.

The result is very fast and smooth pointer movement. It takes a bit of getting used to, but after using it for a week or so, you won’t want to give it up.

The two most-often used buttons, left and right click, have been placed on the left side of the widget, about where a right-hander's thumb would rest. In between is a scroll wheel. Two programmable buttons are on the right side.

Left-handers might want to ask Microsoft for equal treatment. A lefty could use the device, of course, by programming the right button keys, but that would put the scroll wheel under the pinky.

The ball has some carry to it and, particularly when whipping about a Web page or spreadsheet, a tendency to ''throw" the cursor in the right direction with a whole-hand spin of the ball; again, this reduces the tiny movements that generate wrist pain. Microsoft says the trackball generates movement at 36 inches per second, a tad more than 120 mph.

All this isn't cheap: the Trackball Explorer, expected to be widely available in November, should sell for about $75. It has a five-year warranty and will work on both Windows and Macintosh platforms.

Requirements for Windows-based systems include Windows 95 or later, or Windows NT 4.0 with Service Pack 3, or Windows 2000. It will work with a round PS/2 mouse port or a USB (Universal Serial Bus) port, but if you use a USB, you need Windows 98, 2000 or ME. The software included chews up 29 MB of hard-disk space.

For the Mac, you'll need OS 8.5.1 or later (iMac folk need update 1.1), a USB port and 15 MB of space.

The install software is on a CD-ROM. A recent visit to the Microsoft Web site (http://www.microsoft.com) didn't turn up any mention of Trackball Explorer, but it probably will show up soon.

Apple Announces QuickTime 5

Over a year-and-a-half since version 4 was announced, Apple Tuesday rolled out QuickTime 5 with a new redesigned interface at the second annual QuickTime Live! Conference in Beverly Hills, California.

First reported in late August by MacCentral that it would be rolled out at the conference, Apple's vice president of Worldwide Product Marketing, Phil Schiller, told the crowd that QT 5 will become a final product over the next year with a "bunch of releases," beginning with a "preview release" available immediately. A Windows version will be available by years end, Schiller said.

Schiller described the new features of QT 5 as "subtle changes" to the re-designed interface. "

Among them include:

* Live dragging while content is streaming.
* New slider volume control, instead of a turning wheel.
* Addition Interface 'skins' users and developers alike can use via PhotoShop files.
* Minimize feature for audio only.
* A TV button instead of an items drawer.

Other highlights of Schiller’s address includ:

* New coder/decorders (CODECs) as part of QT5 that will integrate Macromedia Flash and Shoutcast streams, Sorenson’s new version 3 codec as well as streaming MPEG1 encoding. Another additional codec will include the Cubic VR codec for panning in all axes via QuickTime VR.

* Schiller, together with QT5 QuickTime Product Marketing Manager Rhonda Stratton, showed off "Skip Protection" which protects against media "skipping," or dropping frames, caused by the unpredictability of Internet transmissions.

* QT5 will include a component download feature that will allow developers to build plug-ins for additional QuickTime functionality such as DDD, which takes existing video and encodes it in 3-D for viewing with 3-D glasses; Pulse 3D, which provides playback of low-bandwidth 3D interactive animations; and iPIX, which makes virtual reality software that provides dynamic imaging solutions for creating 360-degree spherical images and movies.

* Stratton demonstrated the new ’Hot Picks’ guide for featuring new QT TV content, which allows developers to update static billboards with information on new content for viewers.

Also introduced was the QuickTime Streaming Server 3 and Darwin Streaming Server 3 Public Preview, which will include new streaming enhancements and an easy-to-use Web-based administration interface. It will be available through a number of manufacturers including Apple, SGI, IBM and Sun Microsystems.

Microsoft’s Office for Macintosh to Hit Shelves

Microsoft on Tuesday said it is launching the latest and greatest version of its Office software for Apple Computer machines, with the two companies hailing the event as the dawn of a new era in cooperation between the once bitter rivals.

Office 2001 for Apple’s Macintosh operating system that powers computers like its colorful iMac will hit store shelves on Wednesday with a sticker price of $499 for the full version and $299 for an upgrade from an earlier version.

The new package, which includes the Word word-processing program, Excel for creating spreadsheets, and PowerPoint presentation software, is the first major update to the package in two years.

Office 2001 also bears a more Mac-like look and feel as well as a Mac-only application called Entourage that melds e-mail, a calendar, to-do list and notepad.

‘‘This is unmatched in terms of the collaboration between the two companies," said Clent Richardson, vice president of Apple’s World Wide Developers division.

‘‘We are thrilled by it. This really is a must-have upgrade ... and if you don’t have Office 2001 you won’t be able to enjoy a lot of the features

Microsoft has built into its products," Richardson said.

In an example of the closer collaboration between the two computing giants, Apple, for the first time and with the blessing of Chief Executive Steve Jobs himself, granted Microsoft a special license to use the ‘‘Mac" trademark in its new marketing campaign for its Macintosh-based products.

Microsoft products for Macintosh systems will bear a ‘‘:mac" suffix, so Office 2001 will actually be sold as ‘‘Office:mac", for example.

‘‘You’re seeing a new era of new partnership between the two companies. In the past we couldn’t talk to each other without having lawyers in every room, and today we’re talking across every level of the business," said Kevin Browne, general manager of Microsoft’s Mac business unit.

The rivalry between Apple and Microsoft dates back to the early days of personal computing in the 1980s, when Jobs and Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates went head-to-head for control of the budding market.

By the mid-1990s, however, Microsoft was the clear leader, with its Windows operating system having an estimated 90 percent market share while Apple teetered on the verge of collapse.

In 1997, Microsoft took a $150 million investment in its struggling competitor and pledged to continue making Macintosh software, a commitment that many analysts say helped to pull Apple back from the brink.

Browne said Microsoft was looking at making a version of Office for Apple’s upcoming upgrade to the Macintosh operating system, Mac OS X, which is pronounced ‘‘OS-Ten".

‘‘We are able to take our technical teams and put them full time looking at OS X. We have nothing to announce at this point. It would be hard to call a time when you can expect that," Browne said.

Browne’s team was also looking at how to infuse upcoming Mac products with elements of Microsoft’s new .NET strategy that will build Internet features into products like Office and start to sell them as a subscription service rather than as boxed software.

‘‘We want to be able to allow Mac customers to take advantage of everything Microsoft has to offer," Browne said.

Microsoft Fixes Bug in WebTV Software

Microsoft has acknowledged and fixed a problem that could let attackers crash some Windows 98 or Windows Me computers from afar.

The vulnerability let an attacker crash a computer running Microsoft’s WebTV software simply by sending it a certain type of information over the Internet. The problem affected only computers on which the WebTV software had been installed and was running.

The WebTV software, not to be confused with the special-purpose hardware that goes by the same name, lets a person watch television on a computer.

Bug hunter Andrew Griffiths notified Microsoft of the attack in August and

publicly announced it in September, but Microsoft refused to acknowledge whether it was in fact a problem until Wednesday. Microsoft now has come around to Griffiths’ point of view.

Microsoft released separate patches for Windows 98 and Windows Me.

Cracked! ’World’s Toughest’ Code Broken

Swedes use 70 years of computer time to decipher 10 increasingly difficult codes set by author Simon Singh.

A team of Swedish computer buffs have fought off thousands of rivals from around the world to crack what was billed as the toughest code challenge ever set.

It took the Swedes the equivalent of 70 years of computer time to decipher 10 increasingly difficult codes set by author Simon Singh in his international bestseller "The Code Book."

They ranged from ciphers dating back to ancient Greece through Victorian codes and the famed Nazi Enigma code machine from World War Two.

"It is the toughest code that has ever been cracked," Singh said on Thursday before handing over the first prize check for 10,000 pounds ($15,000) to the team headed by Fredrik Almgren.

Almgren works on Internet security. He solved the puzzle with software developer Torbjorn Granlund and a trio of computer buffs from the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm.

The challenge had obsessed thousands of codebreakers around the world. They even set up their own Web site which attracted 2,500 fans from a 14-year-old schoolboy to math professors.

Singh, believing that the ultimate prize was out of their reach, had already given a 1,000-pound prize to two computer buffs who had cracked the first nine codes. But then the Swedes came through with the solution to the final ‘‘512 bit" code.

Singh, who has a doctorate in physics at Cambridge University, took two years to create the brain teasers with Dr Paul Leyland, who works for Microsoft in Cambridge.

They worked in total secrecy. ‘‘I regularly went into my little garden, dipped the relevant papers in molten wax and set them alight," Singh told Thursday’s Daily Telegraph.

Almgren admitted that it was a long, hard grind and the Swedish team were tempted to abandon ship at times.

‘‘The first stages were very simple but at one point we thought we wouldn’t get any further than stage eight," he told BBC radio.

‘‘When you do come to the 10th stage it is a question of heavy mathematics and rather difficult algorithms that I don’t even claim to understand myself."

The cipher the team finally cracked is similar to the on-line security used by Internet banking and shopping outlets. But Singh argued that this did not mean Internet security had been compromised.

‘‘It is the sort of thing that some people do use on the Internet for Internet security," Singh said.

‘‘That doesn’t necessarily mean that Internet security is invalid because it took a year for a team of Swedes to crack this with some very sophisticated computers."

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